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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, July 13, 1932.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Start Good Food Habits Early." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

The other day I had a letter from a worried mother. Her problem is one that a good many of us have had to solve. Let me read you her letter:

"Dear Aunt Sammy: I have studied carefully the right foods to feed my youngster, but I find that that is only half the battle. What would you do with a child who seems to spend all his spare time thinking up ways to frustrate plans to make him eat? Sometimes I'm at my wit's end to know what to do with him. I think I know what to feed him; now can you tell me how to make him like it? Because, after all, unless he'll eat them, none of the foods I prepare will help build strong bones and a healthy body for him."

This letter I sent to Mrs. Carpenter at the Bureau of Home Economics. She has made a study of the food habits of children and I knew she'd be interested.

"What that child needs," Mrs. Carpenter answered, "is some good food habits. And food habits are largely a matter of how we parents start with children. It's so very easy to make the right start in establishing good food habits. You see, very young children have no decided tastes--no likes and dislikes, as we know them. None of us are born with food prejudices. We acquire these tastes through happy or unhappy experiences in eating.

"For example, if a child tastes a certain food many times under happy circumstances, he gets used to the flavor and develops a liking for it through habit. But one unfortunate experience with a new food may create a lasting dislike. So it's wise to be sure that the child is well, that he isn't over-tired or unhappy or ill-tempered when he eats. Then start him in with a very small amount of the new food. Increase the size of the portion the next time, and in this way, you let him gradually build up a taste for new foods one by one. Before the child is even weaned, he has become used to a number of fruit, vegetable and cereal flavors. By the time, he is two years old, he is acquainted with almost as wide a variety of foods as his parents.

"Perhaps the greatest single good influence in building suitable food habits is a good appetite. It stands to reason that a hungry child is less likely to pick and choose at the table, less likely to be finicky, indifferent or to refuse to eat, than a child who has no appetite. Good health and good appetite usually go hand in hand. And both are stimulated by exercise fresh air, sunshine and enough rest and sleep, also by regular hours of eating and by the right foods.

"Did you ever stop to think how eating increases the desire to eat? That is as true of little children as it is of grown-ups. On days that small Rob has his normal good appetite, he not only starts his meal with zest, but his pleasure over eating seems to increase as the meal hour goes on. Of course, good food, prepared in interesting-looking though simple ways, and served in dishes with a gay design, also creates a desire to eat. So does the fun of feeding one's self. Using one's own spoon or spearing little pieces of vegetables or meat with one's own small fork becomes an absorbing game, a game that makes the child feel happy and important over his independence, while he is unconsciously developing steadiness in his small muscles."

There are certain definite ways that any mother can help her child develop good food habits. Such habits will make life happier both for parents and the children themselves. Mrs. Carpenter gave me some good suggestions which I want to pass on to you.

Set a definite time for meals, and allow no distractions during the meal hour.

Have the food attractive in color, odor, and flavor, so that it will tempt the child's appetite.

Serve small portions so that the child can clear his plate without the feeling of being stuffed.

Take it for granted that he will eat happily everything set before him.

Be sure that he becomes acquainted early with a variety of foods.

Let him feed himself as early as possible and experience the pleasure of self-help.

Be consistent in responding to a child's pranks and ruses. Laughing at something he does one time and punishing the same act the next time is never effective. It simply causes confusion and unhappiness.

Remember that the table is a place for good comradeship and not for discipline or nagging. As a friend of mine puts it: Meals should be pleasant social occasions not battlegrounds."

Adults at the table should always agree, not differ, over questions about the child's eating. Any differences can be settled later out of the child's hearing.

Refrain absolutely, no matter how difficult it is, from discussing the child's eating habits in his presence.

Begin today. The training or the re-training in food habits is too important to wait until tomorrow.

Child psychologists and other specialists in child training have been helping mothers in recent years over the many bumps of bringing up Junior. Have you ever noticed that the methods they suggest aren't new after all? They're the very same methods successful parents have used in all generations.

Think back to Great-Grandmother Adams whose eleven children all turned out to be such a credit and satisfaction to her. Don't you suppose she believed in starting that family in on good habits early? Don't you suppose those children learned independence early? Don't you suppose she believed in having meals on time and doing things with promptness and regularity? I've heard tell that system was her watchword. I've also heard that mealtimes at the Adams home were so pleasant that the neighborhood children used to beg for an invitation there and would eat two helpings of rice pudding and carrots there when they wouldn't touch these foods at home.

But it's time you and I were getting at this business of planning what our family shall have for dinner. I asked the Menu Specialist for an inexpensive dinner today. I also asked for a dinner that would suit all ages around the table. And an in-season dinner. And an easy-to-prepare dinner.

That was quite an order. But she filled it. Here's the menu: Meat loaf; Baked tomatoes; Summer squash; Crusty rolls or drop biscuits; and for dessert, that simple and very good pudding, Tapioca cream with pineapple.

Now about those baked tomatoes. Here's a good and easy way to fix them. First, of course, you wash them. And then you take off the stem ends and cut the tomatoes in half. Place the halves in a shallow greased baking dish. Cover them with buttered bread crumbs seasoned with salt and pepper. Add a little water to keep the tomatoes from sticking to the dish. Bake in a moderate oven for thirty minutes--or until the tomatoes are tender and the crumbs brown.

As for the meat loaf, that's a popular and inexpensive meat dish. Most housekeepers have their own ways of making it. I think you'll be interested in some of the Recipe Lady's ideas on the subject. She believes in combining lean beef with salt pork to give the mixture the best flavor. And for extra fine flavor she cooks the chopped parsley, chopped onion and chopped celery for a few minutes in the frying pan with the pork drippings, and then adds them to the bread crumbs.

By the way, she tells me that the best bread crumbs for meat loaf are very fine and dry.

As for seasonings, beside the celery, parsley and onion she uses tabasco sauce--a few dashes --and salt and pepper, of course.

Some people bake their meat loaf in a deep pan like a loaf of bread. The Recipe Lady, however, believes you get better results in an open roasting pan. You lay a piece of parchment paper on a rack in an open roasting

pan and mold the meat on the paper with the hands into the shape of a loaf. Then you bake the loaf in a moderate oven. Here are two cautions. Don't cover the pan and don't add water.

Meat loaf, you know, is good served hot, or served cold in thin slices with watercress garnish. And there's no better accompaniment to go with it than tomatoes.

Shall I repeat our menu for today, in case you didn't get it all? Meat loaf; Baked whole tomatoes; Summer squash; Crusty rolls or drop biscuits; and Tapioca cream with pineapple.

Tomorrow: Some facts about poison ivy and some simple remedies.

